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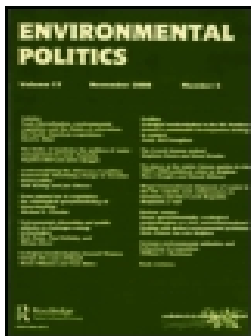
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Energy democracy, dissent and discourse in the party politics of shale gas in the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from an extensive content analysis of the UK parliamentary debate over shale gas, we use the UK shale gas case to explore how energy democracy themes are used and countered in the framing strategies of discourse coalitions in national political sites. Furthermore, we explore the extent to which these national political sites and discursive strategies are effective as institutions and practices through which to achieve energy democracy. We achieve this through an analysis of the success of the UK anti- and pro-shale gas development discourse coalitions in recruiting national political figures and influencing thinking and decision-making in parliament. In doing so, we bring together the literatures on discourse coalitions and energy democracy. We conclude with implications for both national policy as well as critical inquiry into environmental politics.

KEYWORDS Energy democracy; shale gas; hydraulic fracturing; frames; discursive coalitions; party politics

Introduction

In debates about participatory forms of energy decision-making, the recently curtailed seven-year pursuit of shale gas in the United Kingdom perhaps casts in doubt that advanced democracies will pursue democratic forms of energy planning. Using hydraulic fracturing to exploit domestic shale gas resources did not enjoy widespread general public support in the United Kingdom (UK) (BEIS 2019). Furthermore, early exploratory sites provoked local community opposition wherever proposed.

In spite of this public ambivalence, five successive UK governments supported the establishment of a domestic shale gas industry until a moratorium was announced due to persistent seismicity at the company Cuadrilla's Preston New Road (PNR) shale gas exploratory site (BEIS and the Oil and Gas Authority 2019). Prior to this, UK governments had made a number of changes to the planning system in order to help facilitate development. In 2016, using recently established appeal recovery powers

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(DCLG 2015), the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Sajid Javid granted planning permission to PNR, overturning the initial decision to refuse permission by Lancashire County Council (LCC). More recently the government had consulted on now abandoned proposals to treat shale production projects as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) and non-fracking exploratory projects as permitted development (BEIS 2018, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2018). It had been widely anticipated that these reforms would limit the scope for local input in decision-making on shale development (House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee 2018, CPRE 2018a). In fact, Matthew Cotton has located recent planning reforms on shale development within a broader trajectory of planning reform toward the greater streamlining and centralisation of planning decision-making (Cotton 2017).

Drawing from an extensive content analysis of political testimony, we use the UK shale gas case to explore how energy democracy themes are used and countered in the framing strategies of discourse coalitions in national political sites. Energy democracy, broadly speaking, is a movement and aim that combines efforts towards decarbonisation of the energy system and sustainability transitions more broadly with attempts to achieve more democratic energy decision-making and greater community ownership of a decentralised energy system. We also explore whether influencing thinking and decision-making in national political sites can be an effective means of pursuing energy democracy aims. In order to do so we assess energy democracy in terms of the concept of the discourse coalition, because the energy democracy literature lacks theorising about how change may be brought about through conventional political institutions and practices.

Moreover, our analysis illustrates that the political parties involved in shale gas debates are not monoliths and have many shifting characters and agents with diffuse strategies, at times amounting to dissent within each party. These various agents deploy energy democracy frames, alongside others, in potentially instrumental ways.

Background: ‘bad gas governance’ and discourse coalition membership in the UK shale development debate

Shale gas started to emerge as an issue in UK media and political discourse after 2010 (Mazur 2016), although it was not until 2011 that the issue started to gain a degree of public notoriety (see Figure 1).

By early 2014, criticisms about accountability, democracy and local community input in the governance of shale development had, according to one study, become the dominant form of anti-shale development discourse in the UK (Bomberg 2017). The subsequent planning reforms, overturned

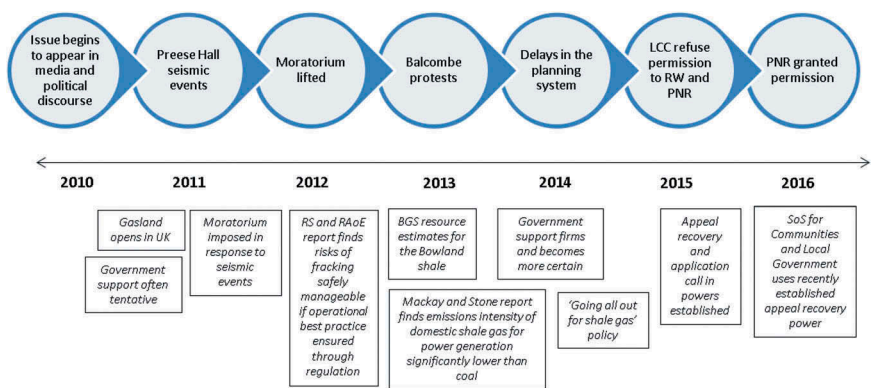


Figure 1. The timeline of the emergence of shale gas as a public issue in the UK, 2010 to 2018.

decisions, and further proposed reforms discussed above were only likely to have exacerbated this in the period leading up to the recent moratorium, placing energy democracy themes such as local community influence over decision making at the heart of the issue (see [Figure 2](#) for an example). Responding to the granting of planning permission to the PNR site, Pat



Figure 2. Graffiti protesting against hydraulic fracturing on Crosse Hall Lane Bridge, Lancashire, as seen from the M61 southbound near junction 8, 2018.

Davies, the chair of local opposition group Preston New Road Action Group, described the decision as 'neither right, nor fair and not least, it is wholly undemocratic', whilst accusing the Government of a 'callous disregard for local planning' and 'dismantling the democratic process to facilitate a dirty fossil fuel industry' (Hayhurst 2016, p. no pagination). Furthermore, the Campaign to Protect Rural England had described the proposed NSIP and permitted development reforms as bypassing the rights of local communities (CPRE 2018a), and as 'an unacceptable move that will undermine local democracy and faith in the planning system' (CPRE 2018b, p. no pagination).

As already discussed, we are interested in both discourse coalition membership and the playing out of these energy democracy themes in the UK parliament. The UK parliament consists of an elected lower house, the House of Commons (HoC), and a largely appointed upper house, the House of Lords (HoL). Parliament's main functions are to scrutinise the government, approve government spending, make and change laws, and debate the important issues of the day. The political party that wins the most seats at a general election forms the government; and government positions – cabinet ministers and junior ministers – are primarily filled by Members of Parliament (MPs) from the governing party, with some positions filled by members of the HoL. During our period of analysis (2010–2018) there were five UK governments, most of which have been supportive of shale development.¹

Our assessment of the UK parliament as a potential site of energy democracy is based on an analysis of discourse coalition membership within parliament. A number of studies have analysed the discursive struggle over shale gas in the UK (Cotton *et al.* 2014, Bomberg 2017, Stephan 2017, Nyberg *et al.* 2018), as well as advocacy coalition membership (Cairney *et al.* 2016, 2018, Ingold *et al.* 2017). Bomberg (2017) and Cotton *et al.* (2014) yield the most information regarding *discourse* coalition membership in the broader UK shale gas debate (i.e. beyond our narrow focus on parliamentary debate); they have identified a pro-shale gas coalition populated by the government and much of the Conservative party alongside many geoscientists, oil and gas firms, industry networks (e.g. the Institute of Directors), and parts of the media (e.g. the *Daily Telegraph*) (Cotton *et al.* 2014, Bomberg 2017). The anti-shale gas coalition has consisted of environmental NGOs, local protestors and community members, the Green party, some Labour and Conservative politicians (both local councillors and MPs in affected areas), some experts, and some of the media (e.g. the *Guardian*) (Cotton *et al.* 2014, Bomberg 2017).

We contribute to this literature by focusing specifically on the dynamics of discourse coalition membership in Westminster. There has, to our knowledge, been no systematic analysis of shale development *discourse* coalition

membership amongst UK national political actors (government members, MPs and members of the HoL). This focus should not be taken to downplay the importance of actors and events in the broader discursive struggle beyond parliament (e.g. the efforts of local community groups and NGOs); rather the focus here is on the relative strength and achievements of these broader coalitions within parliament over our timeframe.

Conceptual framework: energy democracy meets discourse coalitions

As already discussed, we are interested in how energy democracy themes figure in the framing strategies of shale development discourse coalitions at Westminster and whether national sites and discursive action are effective means through which to pursue energy democracy. This entails bringing together two concepts – energy democracy and discourse coalitions.

Energy democracy

The notion of energy democracy largely grew out of grassroots activists and NGOs in the United States and parts of Europe particularly around 2010 (van Veelen and van der Horst 2018). Although some consider it still an under-defined concept (Szulecki 2018), it has recently attracted increasing academic attention and critical engagement (see, for instance, Burke and Stephens 2017, 2018, Szulecki 2018, van Veelen and van der Horst 2018, van Veelen 2018). The energy democracy movement connects the current centralised, corporate, fossil-fuel dominated energy system with economic inequality, social injustice and a democratic deficit in energy governance (Burke and Stephens 2017), and identifies the transition towards a renewable based energy system as an opportunity to transform economic and governance systems. This is partly a result of the material properties of renewable energy – primarily its decentralised nature – which compared to fossil fuels is arguably more conducive to radically different ways of organising social and political life.

van Veelen and van der Horst (2018) argue that energy democracy can be considered as both an outcome and a process: an idealised vision of the future where, typically, energy systems are decentralised, collectively owned and controlled, equitable, and socially and environmentally sustainable; and the series of political struggles through which advocates attempt to bring this future about (van Veelen and van der Horst 2018). As Angel (2016, p. 4) puts it, energy democracy can be seen as ‘an abstract vision of a future energy system’ or ‘an ongoing series of multiple struggles over who owns and controls energy and how, where and for whom energy is produced and consumed’. As van Veelen and van der Horst (2018) point out, process

and outcome are often seen as linked, as participatory governance procedures are frequently imagined to lead to more legitimate, fair and sustainable outcomes.

The style of democracy underpinning the energy democracy vision of how to choose, organise and run the energy system is primarily *associative*, with secondary influences from *deliberative* and *material* democracy (van Veelen and van der Horst 2018). In associative democracy ‘as many of the affairs of society as possible are managed by voluntary and democratically self-organising associations’ (Hirst 1994, p. 15). Deliberative democracy involves inclusive and open deliberation in which all affected by a decision have the opportunity to participate and through which consensus emerges around an option whose consequences all can non-coercively accept (Habermas 1987, 1990, Dryzek 2000, Chambers 2003). Material democracy, finally, is concerned with public access to and control over material resources (van Veelen and van der Horst 2018), as well the role of objects in constituting publics and forms of political participation (Marres 2012).

The energy democracy movement tends to privilege local scales, focusing particularly on the community as an ideal social grouping of political action. There is also a focus on particular forms of political action such as community ownership and control of the means to produce and distribute energy. These material forms of participation typically take precedence over more conventional forms of political action. There are some exceptions to these emphases. Weinrub (2014), for instance, argues for greater integration with conventional forms of ‘institutional democracy’, whereas others focus on conventional forms of political action such as voting, debating and participating in policy decisions (Farrell 2014, Kunze and Becker 2014, Vansintjan 2015, Weinrub and Giancattarino 2015).

Notwithstanding these exceptions, the energy democracy movement can tend to neglect the political sites and institutions of constitutional-liberal representative democracy and their relationship with the energy democracy agenda. The policy pursued through these sites can help or hinder moves toward greater energy democracy (e.g. Germany’s *Energiewende*).

Moreover, energy democracy has the potential to overlook conventional and discursive forms of political action and their relationship with the practices and forms of political action more readily associated with the energy democracy agenda. Thus, the residents of the Sussex village of Balcombe – the site of high-profile protests (see Figure 1) – started an energy co-operative with the aim to produce 100% of the village’s electricity requirements (REPOWERBalcombe 2019). This clear example of energy democracy emerged from a typical coalition of local residents and environmental activists opposing an oil exploration site through conventional activities such as protest, legal challenge and opposition through the planning system. This demonstrates the potentially fluid and dynamic relationship between

discursive and material forms of political action, whereby groups may utilise both simultaneously or one may lead to another. In short, groups working towards greater energy democracy are likely to do so through a range of activities, potentially including participating in public debate.

These potential blind spots of the energy democracy literature are of course understandable given that energy democracy grew out of frustrations with conventional institutions and practices of political action. Nonetheless, our aim here is to explore the relationship between energy democracy and these more conventional sites and forms of politics.

Frames and discourse coalitions

Our approach to discourse coalitions and the related notion of frames draws on the work of Robert Entman and Maarten Hajer. For Entman (1993), frames are essentially about *selection* and *salience*: framing is about what is said and what is emphasised. Focusing on and foregrounding and backgrounding particular aspects of an issue can promote a particular definition of the problem, encourage particular interpretations and judgements, and highlight and foreclose particular ways forward (Entman 1993). Various different approaches are taken to the relationship between frames and Hajer's (1995) related notion of storylines (see, for example, Bomberg 2017, Stephan 2017 for two contrasting approaches). In our analysis however, we focus simply on the notions of frames and discourse coalitions, following Stephan's approach of treating frames and storylines as effectively synonymous (Stephan 2017).

Frames are both the tools of discourse coalitions and the 'discursive cement' that brings and keeps these coalitions together (Hajer 1995, p. 65). Whilst framing might at times be tacit rather than strategic and intentional, we view the type of speech analysed here (parliamentary discourse) as typically intentional and in some cases carefully designed for a particular instrumental purpose (e.g. the persuasion of an opponent, the undermining of an opponent's position, the persuasion or representation of a broader public audience).

Discourse coalitions are networks of actors who group around particular frames and ways of talking and thinking about environmental politics (Hajer 1995). The basis of these coalitions is language rather than necessarily shared beliefs, identities or interests (Hajer 1995). This focus on language gives discourse coalitions fluidity, dynamism and perhaps ephemerality, and, as Cotton *et al.* (2014) point out, means that their membership often cuts across traditional political boundaries (e.g. classes, traditional parties) and links diverse actors together in perhaps surprising alliances. Hess (2019) argues that the composition and goals of coalitions are not stable: different frames may be used and emphasised across distinct coalition partners; and new

frames may emerge in response to a change in coalition membership, opposition counter-framing and broader institutional changes.

Hess examines discourse coalitions and their framing strategies in pursuing the twin goal of a transition to a low-carbon electricity system and political reform towards greater local, democratic control and ownership. There is a dual relationship between discourse coalitions and energy democracy: discourse coalitions utilise frames as part of the struggle towards greater energy democracy (e.g. in order to become dominant in a discursive struggle, influence decisions and recruit actors to their coalition); and energy democracy themes may constitute part of the content of frames (e.g. frames concerning decarbonisation and greater local control). In short, energy democracy can figure as both the aim of coalitions and the content of frames.

Following Hess, we explore the role energy democracy themes play in the content of the frames and framing strategies employed in the Westminster shale gas debate, and assess whether the UK parliament is a promising site through which discourse coalitions might achieve energy democracy aims.

Research design: an extensive content analysis of the UK parliamentary debate

We document the discursive frames used about shale gas in national parliamentary debate in Westminster over the timeframe of 01/01/10–30/06/18. We selected this period on the basis of an analysis of the emergence of shale gas and hydraulic fracturing as a political issue in the UK, triangulating between academic literature, interviews conducted by the authors as part of previous research, news coverage, and Hansard (the record of UK parliamentary debate).

Using the keyword search terms ‘hydraulic fracturing’, ‘fracking’, ‘shale gas’ and ‘unconventional gas’, we identified 1,297 relevant passages of parliamentary testimony. We downloaded, stored and analysed the passages using NVivo 12 software. We developed initial themes through a review of the existing literature and the initial stages of this analysis. We refined these themes into a set of frames in an iterative fashion, with frames added or refined in response to further analysis of the corpus (Mason 2002, Suddaby 2006, Urquhart 2013). Furthermore, we coded each source document by time (quarter), and we coded each frame use by actor (individual politician), party affiliation, and position within party (whether they held a government or frontbench role or were on the backbenches).

Our analysis of coalition membership has two elements. First, we identify the frequencies of pro- and anti-shale development frame use by political parties, actor type (e.g. frontbench or backbench) and individual politicians. Here we treat the use of pro- and anti-shale development frames as evidence of discourse coalition membership. Whilst this is both in keeping with

Hajer's conceptualisation of discourse coalitions as being united by the shared use of language and provides a useful sense of the general direction of feeling on the matter within the different parties, it is admittedly a relatively crude measure of coalition membership. For instance, it gives little insight into the strength of an actor's commitment to a coalition or their importance, and classifies ambivalent actors who regularly use both pro and anti frames as being part of both coalitions.

With this in mind, a second, qualitative element to the analysis charts the key actors, activities, and achievements of both discourse coalitions within parliament in order to contextualise the frame use frequencies. This second element identifies the attempts that these coalitions make to institutionalise their frames and materially influence policymaking.

The frames, membership and influence of shale discourse coalitions in the UK parliament

Our analysis of parliamentary debate revealed nine key political frames, four of which are pro-shale and five of which are anti-shale development. We briefly summarise each key frame before the use of energy democracy themes and coalition membership in Westminster are explored.

The key frames of the pro-shale coalition

The first pro-shale frame presents shale gas as *low impact development* in terms of its impact on the landscape and character of rural places. The frame, in short, argues that shale development will not industrialise the British countryside. Whilst admitting that a level of disruption from traffic and noise will be inevitable, the temporary and typical nature of these impacts is stressed. Shale development is here framed as a very ordinary form of industrial activity: its impacts no different from any construction project. Furthermore, this frame envisages a UK shale gas industry with a small surface footprint by fitting large numbers of wells onto a relatively small number of well pads.

The second pro-shale frame presents shale gas as a *lower carbon fuel*, the exploitation of which is compatible with the UK's climate change targets because it can be used as a 'bridge' in the transition to a low-carbon future. This frame views shale gas as more environmentally friendly than coal, and exploiting domestic resources as preferable to imports. It stresses the need for gas for years to come, and as such the question becomes not whether we use gas but where we get gas from.

The third pro-shale frame presents the risks of hydraulic fracturing to the local environment and public health as manageable. This *manageable risk* frame also expresses strong confidence in the robustness of the UK's

regulatory system and in the capacity and experience of the UK's regulators. It argues that near historical experience in parts of the US is not analogous because of the superiority of the UK's regulatory approach. Reference to technical reports and the track-record of UK regulators in the North Sea enhances the credibility of the frame. Finally, the frame stresses the established nature of hydraulic fracturing globally, and shale development's similarity to conventional production more common in the UK.

The final pro-shale frame highlights the *wealth and security* benefits that would arise from the development of a domestic UK shale gas industry. Economic and energy security benefits tend to be spoken of together, and are expressed through terms such as 'home-grown energy'. The frame argues that domestic supplies are inherently more secure than increasing reliance on imports, and stresses the economic benefits of domestic energy production. Both a new sense of abundance encouraged by some large resource estimates (e.g. Andrews 2013) and competitiveness anxiety resulting from the re-shoring of energy intensive industry back to the US in part thanks to the US shale gas revolution underpin this frame.

The key frames of the anti-shale coalition

The first anti-shale development frame focuses on the fairness and inclusivity of decision-making on shale gas, and the behaviour and trustworthiness of governing institutions. The *bad gas governance* frame suggests that a government willing to override local views and decisions is imposing shale development on 'by-passed' communities. Reforms to the planning system, which are seen as removing barriers to development at the expense of local influence over decision-making, are highlighted. Finally, the frame depicts government as 'fast-tracking' fracking and casts this apparent haste as careless.

In a direct challenge to the *lower carbon fuel* frame, the second anti-shale frame presents shale gas as a *dirty fossil fuel* and its exploitation as irreconcilable with UK climate change targets. It presents shale gas development as more environmentally damaging than conventional oil and gas due to the expectation of higher levels of fugitive emissions. The frame is sceptical about the existence of carbon budget space for a domestic shale gas industry; and is concerned about the fate of any displaced fuel, crowding-out investment in renewables and locking the UK into a fossil fuel energy system. Finally, the frame presents the opening up of fossil fuel resources when a large proportion of global proven reserves are 'unburnable' as deeply misguided and irresponsible.

The third anti-shale development frame, the *elusive threats* frame, challenges the *manageable risk* frame's depiction of the threat of hydraulic fracturing to the local environment and public health. It presents the threats

posed by hydraulic fracturing as elusive, insidious and uncertain. It plays up the novelty of high volume hydraulic fracturing and views accidents and surprises as inevitable. It also questions the adequacy of regulation and the capacity of regulators, viewing the former as watered-down and the latter as having been eroded by budget cuts.

The fourth anti-shale frame challenges the *low impact development* frame's depiction of a shale gas industry's impact on the countryside. The *industrialise the countryside* frame envisages a serious and transformative impact on the British countryside. It argues that shale development is a more intensive industrial process compared to conventional oil and gas development due to high depletion rates (requiring the continuous drilling of new wells) and higher volumes of flowback fluid (necessitating more HGV movements).

Finally, the *no repeat revolution* frame is not necessarily anti-shale development in principle but is sceptical about the prospect of a repeat of the US shale gas revolution in the UK. The level of scepticism ranges from not expecting to see a US-style impact on gas prices in the UK to doubting the conditions exist for an industry of any significance to emerge at all. The frame refers to a number of factors that make the UK less conducive to the emergence of a shale gas industry compared to the US, including population density, geological uncertainty and regulatory environment.

Energy democracy themes and the discursive contest over shale development

Three of these frames in particular cover energy democracy-aligned themes – the lower carbon fuel frame, the dirty fossil fuel frame and the bad gas governance frame.

The lower carbon fuel frame demonstrates the institutionalisation of the decarbonisation discourse associated with energy democracy within the British political mainstream. Of course, activists and some experts (e.g. Broderick *et al.* 2011, McGlade *et al.* 2016) have questioned this frame's claims about the relationship between the development of a domestic shale gas industry and the UK's emissions reduction targets. The point here is that in order to be taken seriously the advocates of a new form of fossil fuel development have to frame it as making a positive contribution toward the aim of combating climate change and transitioning towards a low-carbon energy system. The dirty fossil fuel frame demonstrates the difficulty that the pro-shale development discourse coalition has had in attempting to expand their appeal to those with strong environmental concerns.

The bad gas governance frame clearly criticises the governance of shale development in the UK in ways that have parallels with the energy democracy movement. Typically, what the frame envisages is greater local

community influence and control over siting decisions, rather than the community-run and owned renewable projects associated with energy democracy. The pro-shale coalition's response to this is a greater emphasis on local community economic benefits as part of the wealth and security frame. The industry body's Community Engagement Charter (UKOOG 2013) and the Government's Shale Wealth Fund (HM Treasury 2017) both promise significant financial benefits to communities that host shale development sites with community control about how proceeds are spent, though they obviously fall well short of the co-operative ownership structures associated with energy democracy.

In both cases, what is demonstrated is the difficulty in continuing to promote a centralised, corporate, fossil fuel energy system in a society that expects democratic decision-making and action on climate change. As a fossil fuel, shale gas has been framed as a non-transition – as a short-termist continuation of unsuitable practices, as avoiding difficult decisions and changes, and as not in line with the urgently required rapid and deep transition (Parkhill *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, it is a corporate-owned industry, and government and industry have had to create the sense that local communities have a stake and shared interest in seeing an industry emerge. Finally, the bad gas governance frame makes clear an expectation of local community influence over decision-making that is in tension with centralised, large-scale infrastructure planning.

Frame use, dissent, and discourse coalition membership in Westminster

Table 1 summarises the use of the pro-shale frames by political party, whilst Table 2 summarises anti-shale frame use. Following Hajer's (1995) conceptualisation of discourse coalitions, we treat pro or anti frame use as evidence of membership of the corresponding discourse coalition.

Table 1 demonstrates the Conservative party dominating the pro-shale development coalition in Westminster during our timeframe of analysis. All Conservative-led and Conservative governments within our timeframe were key members of the pro-shale coalition. This is reflected in the fact that many of the most prolific pro-frame users are Conservatives who have had relevant government positions. These roles have involved them setting out, defending and answering questions about government policy on shale. Key examples here are Andrea Leadsom (as Minister of State for Energy and Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – 58 pro-frame uses), Michael Fallon (as Minister of State for Energy – 53 pro-frame uses), and Baroness Verma (as parliamentary under-secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change – 44 pro-frame uses).

There are also high levels of pro-coalition membership amongst Conservative backbenchers, who are not compelled to support government policy, unlike those

Table 1. Use of pro-shale development frames by political party in the UK.

| Political party | Low impact development | Lower carbon fuel | Manageable risk | Wealth and security | Total pro-shale development frame use |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Conservative party | 25 | 160 | 242 | 421 | 848 |
| Government | 7 | 67 | 172 | 221 | 467 |
| Backbenchers | 18 | 93 | 70 | 200 | 381 |
| Labour party | 2 | 18 | 22 | 62 | 104 |
| Frontbench | 0 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 20 |
| Backbenchers | 2 | 11 | 16 | 55 | 84 |
| Liberal Democrat party | 1 | 11 | 24 | 27 | 63 |
| Government (2010–2015) | 0 | 6 | 17 | 10 | 33 |
| Non-government (backbench or out of office) | 1 | 5 | 7 | 17 | 30 |
| Green party | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other Parties | | | | | |
| Alliance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DUP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Cross-bench, independent, non-affiliated, | 0 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 18 |
| Plaid Cymru | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| SNP | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| UKIP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| UUP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

with roles in the government. Key examples include David Mowat (as MP for Warrington South – 44 pro-frame uses), Tim Yeo (as MP for South Suffolk and chair of the Energy and Climate Change Select Committee – 31 pro-frame uses) and Kevin Hollinrake (MP for Thirsk and Malton – 27 pro-frame uses). During the coalition government (2010–2015) a number of Liberal Democrats (LD) were also members of the pro-shale coalition. In particular, this included Ed Davey, who as the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change was the most prominent LD in a relevant government role. There was some pro-shale gas frame use spread out across LD backbenchers during this period. As [Figure 3](#) below makes clear, LDs in Westminster almost entirely abandoned the pro-shale coalition after 2015.

Finally, some Labour parliamentarians have been members of the pro-shale coalition. In particular, a group of MPs representing constituencies in former industrial heartlands in the north of England were attracted by the wealth and security frame and especially ideas around the role of shale gas in boosting domestic energy-intensive industries. There were 55 uses of this frame by Labour backbenchers in our corpus, by far the largest use of a pro-shale development frame outside of the Conservative party. The most prolific Labour backbench users of the wealth and security frame were Graham Stringer (Brackley and Broughton, Greater Manchester), Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge, South Yorkshire), Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, North East England), and Caroline Flint (Don Valley, South Yorkshire). These MPs all represent

Table 2. Use of anti-shale development frames by political party in the UK.

| Political party | Bad gas government | Dirty fossil fuel | Elusive threats | Industrialise the countryside | No repeat revolution | Total anti-shale development frame use |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Conservative party | 23 | 5 | 20 | 31 | 28 | 107 |
| Government | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 13 | 19 |
| Backbenchers | 23 | 5 | 17 | 28 | 15 | 88 |
| Labour party | 104 | 52 | 71 | 37 | 27 | 291 |
| Frontbench | 63 | 18 | 20 | 11 | 16 | 128 |
| Backbenchers | 41 | 34 | 51 | 26 | 11 | 163 |
| Liberal Democrat party | 8 | 22 | 14 | 5 | 9 | 58 |
| Government (2010–2015) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Non-government (backbench or out of office) | 8 | 22 | 14 | 5 | 9 | 58 |
| Green party | 31 | 39 | 19 | 2 | 3 | 94 |
| Other parties | | | | | | |
| Alliance | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| DUP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cross-bench, independent, non-affiliated, | 2 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 22 |
| Plaid Cymru | 1 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 16 |
| SNP | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 20 |
| UKIP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| UUP | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |

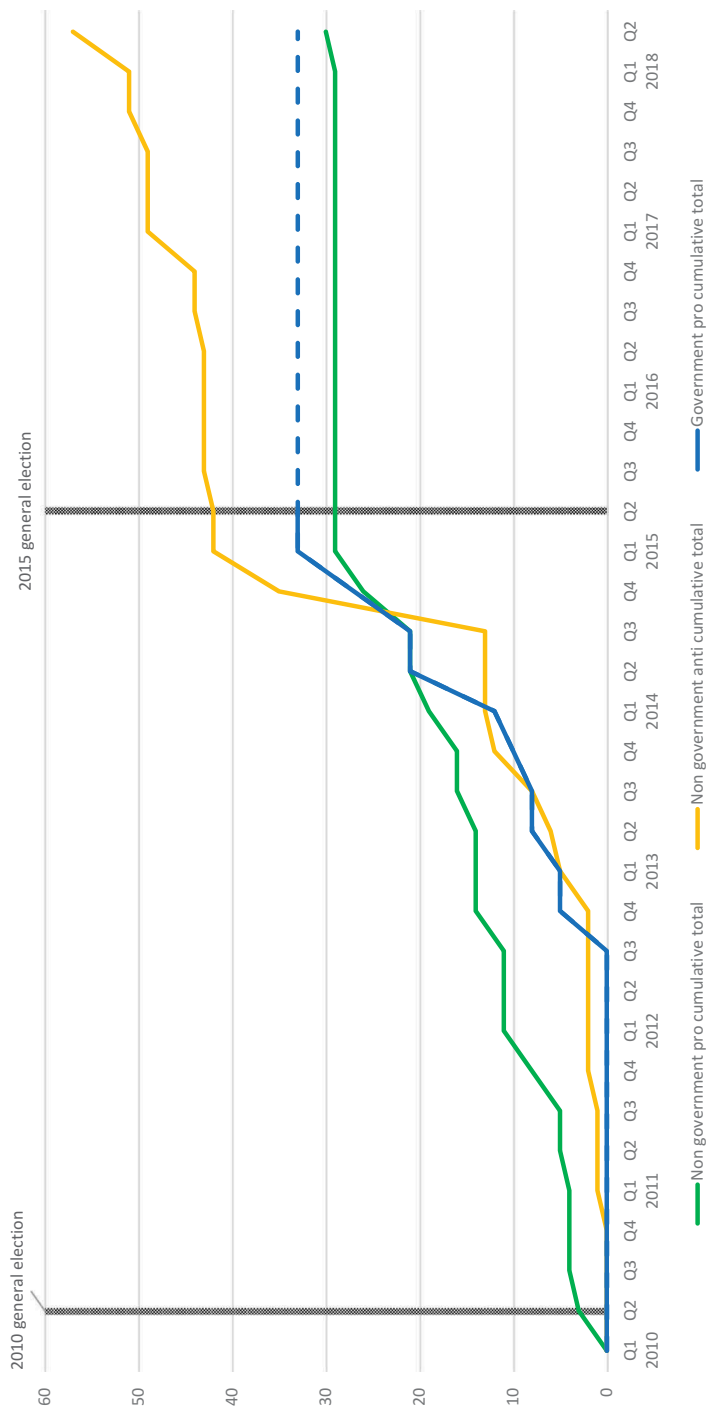


Figure 3. Cumulative pro- and anti-shale development frame use by the Liberal Democrats in and out of Government.

constituencies in the north of England, many of them either home to or near steelworks or with a history of coal mining. In other words, these are constituencies with industrial interests and heritage. These MPs were joined by a small number of Labour peers.

The anti-shale development coalition had broader-based membership in Westminster during our timeframe, with prominent members coming from a wider range of parties. Having said this, as [Table 2](#) demonstrates, the Labour Party were the dominant force within the anti-shale coalition in Westminster during the period of our analysis. Prominent Labour coalition members came from both the front- and backbenches and included Alan Whitehead (MP for Southampton Test – 37 anti-frame uses), Tom Greatrex (former shadow Energy Minister – 35 anti-frame uses), Joan Walley (then MP for Stoke-on-Trent North and former chair of the Environmental Audit Select Committee – 19 anti-frame uses), and Barbara Keeley (MP for Worsley and Eccles South – 18 anti-frame uses). In spite of having only one MP and one member of the House of Lords, the Green Party was also a key part of the anti-shale coalition in Westminster, and was particularly associated with the ‘bad gas governance’ and ‘dirty fossil fuel’ frames; Caroline Lucas MP and Baroness Jenny Jones of Moulsecoombe were entirely consistent in using only anti-shale development frames and were amongst the most prolific users of anti-shale development frames in our sample (65 and 29 uses respectively).

Other prominent members of the anti-shale coalition had a range of affiliations: Norman Baker (then LD MP for Lewes) and Baroness Featherstone (former LD spokesperson for Energy and Climate Change); Lord Wigley (Plaid Cymru); Lee Rowley (MP for North East Derbyshire, Conservative); and the non-affiliated Lord Truscott.

Finally, Lee Rowley is the most prominent example of a significant group of anti-shale gas frame users on the Conservative backbenches focused particularly on the ‘bad gas governance’ and ‘industrialise the countryside’ frames. Other examples include Mark Menzies (MP for the Fylde), Anne MacIntosh (originally MP for Thirsk and Malton, latterly Baroness MacIntosh of Pickering), Kevin Hollinrake (MP for Thirsk and Malton), and Eric Ollerenshaw (MP for Lancaster and Fleetwood). These MPs all represent relatively rural constituencies containing or adjoining proposed or actual shale gas exploration sites. This group of Conservatives, along with the aforementioned pro-shale Labour MPs, is an important reminder of dissent within the two main parties in the parliamentary politics of shale gas in Westminster. In fact, with the exception of the Green Party, the prominent parties in our corpus have all experienced significant dissent within their ranks over their position on shale development.

Coalition membership over time

An analysis of frame use over time gives a mixed picture as to relationship between coalition membership and a party's policy on shale gas. Whilst the Conservative and Green parties were consistent in their official policies on shale development within our timeframe (with the former always supportive and the latter always opposing), both Labour and the LDs have gone through shifts.

The LDs were in coalition with the Conservatives from 2010–2015, during which time government policy was largely supportive of shale development (notwithstanding a short moratorium 2011–2012). As [Figure 3](#) demonstrates, during this period enthusiasm for shale development initially comes from LD MPs without a role in the government, with LDs in the government only starting to voice support from late 2012. Anti-shale development frame use from LDs without a role in the government also starts slowly but picks up by the end of 2014. After the 2015 general election, when the LDs left government, pro-shale development frame use almost entirely stops, whilst anti-shale frame use continues to climb gently.

[Figure 4](#) demonstrates that Labour frame use has had relatively little relationship with Labour party policy. Their initial policy position of 'cautious and conditional' support was announced in early 2012, although whilst this policy was in place anti-shale development frame use in the Labour outstripped pro-shale development frame use, including amongst the front-bench. This policy of cautious support was based on the condition of strict regulation, allowing Labour actors in our corpus to use anti-shale development frames concerning the current inadequacy of regulation or the poor governance of the Conservative party whilst still adhering to their policy. Labour then shifted to a moratorium policy at the end of 2015 and then again to a ban policy in September 2016. In spite of this official party opposition, there have been a couple of subsequent jumps in backbench pro-shale development frame use.

The key activities and achievements of the pro and anti-shale development coalitions in Westminster

With the pro-shale development coalition having included most of the governments in our timeframe, this coalition has clearly been more able to institutionalise its frames in concrete decisions and policy action. Key early successes included the recruitment of the then Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, who publicly threw his weight behind shale in 2012, along with the then Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron in 2013. With the Conservative government strongly rhetorically committed, the pro-shale coalition was able to materially influence policy in ways

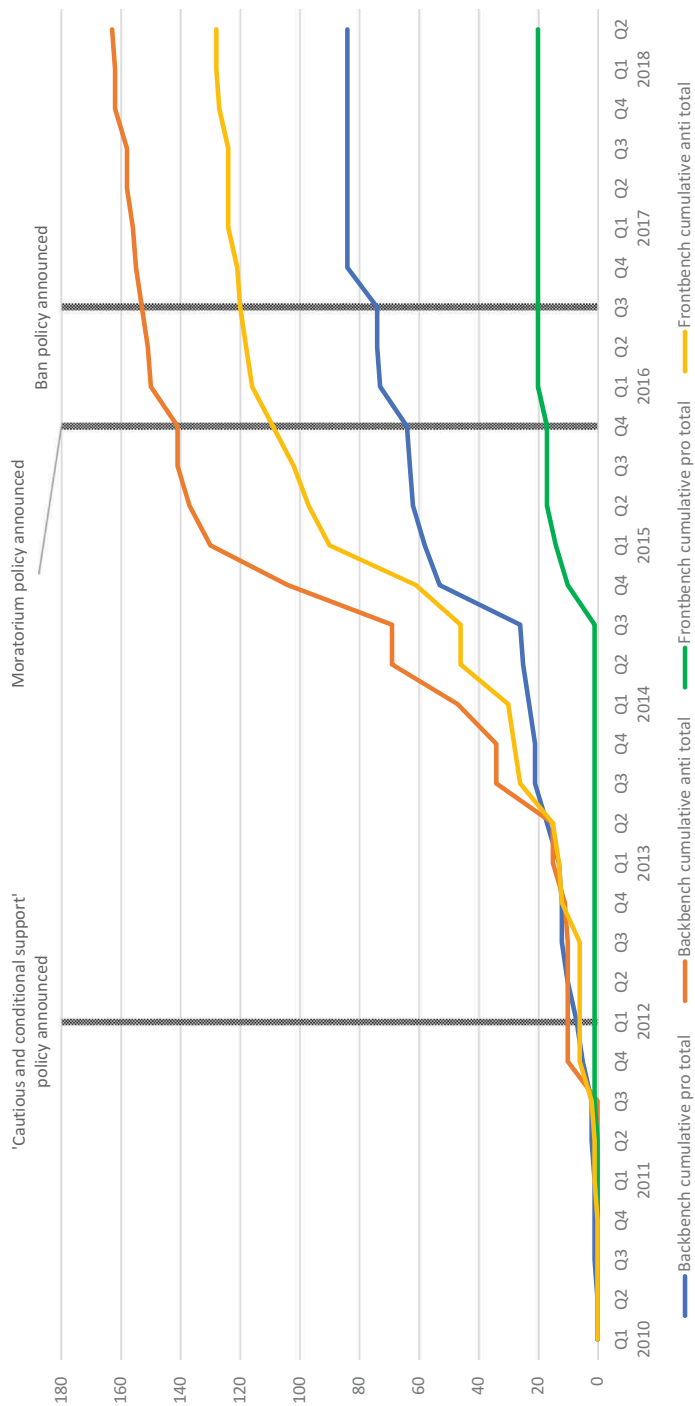


Figure 4. Labour frontbench and backbench use of pro- and anti-shale development frames.

designed to facilitate the development of an industry. This included important changes to taxation, subsurface access rights and planning, and the introduction of a community benefit fund. Beyond supportive policy formulation, another key Westminster activity is the production of select committee reports. As Nyberg *et al.* (2018) point out, select committee reports are a key means through which the pro-shale discourse coalition's frames in particular have 'solidified' through processes of certainty and quantification. The HoL Economic Affairs Committee's 2014 report is the clearest pro-shale development example during our timeframe.

Whilst having a substantial presence in Westminster, the anti-shale discourse coalition never controlled the levers of power during our timeframe. Nonetheless, it still had some success in materially influencing decisions over the regulation of shale development at Westminster. Although a number of representatives and other commentators accused the government of watering them down (see Hayhurst 2015a), the anti-coalition did win a number of concessions during the passing of the Infrastructure Act 2015. These included conditions for fracking, such as baseline monitoring of methane in groundwater and monitoring of methane emissions to air during operations, independent well inspections and banning fracking within 'protected groundwater source areas' and within (though not necessarily under) 'protected areas' (Hayhurst 2015b, p. no pagination).

Alongside this degree of success in tightening the regulation of hydraulic fracturing in the UK, the anti-coalition had some notable recruitment successes over the course of our timeframe. The Labour Party, LDs and the Scottish National Party all shifted to more hostile policy positions. Perhaps just as importantly a small number of Conservative MPs became increasingly willing to criticise shale development on the grounds of rural industrialisation and the undermining of local democracy. Key figures here include Lee Rowley – who chairs the sceptical All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Impact of Shale Gas – as well as a number of MPs who, whilst not necessarily anti-fracking, strongly oppose the NSIP and permitted development proposals.

Finally, select committees are also important vehicles for the anti-fracking coalition. The key example in our timeframe is the Environmental Audit Committee's 2015 report which called for a moratorium.

Discussion: achieving energy democracy through national political sites and discursive action

If we view the emergence of a UK shale gas industry as running counter to the aims of energy democracy, our analysis demonstrates that during the period 2010–2018 the anti-shale coalition had limited success in achieving energy democracy through the UK parliament. Most obviously, government policy remained strongly supportive of a domestic industry throughout our time period

and efforts to impose a moratorium or ban failed. Furthermore, pro-shale development frames were more widely used than anti-shale frames in the UK parliament.

However, in spite of this, those pursuing energy democracy aims, such as decarbonisation and greater local control over energy decision-making, have some reasons for optimism. First, though large, the pro-shale coalition was not broad-based. A few Labour backbenchers aside, it was based almost exclusively in the Conservative party. The broader pro-shale discourse coalition had relatively little success in appealing to actors beyond the Conservative party within parliament, meaning that national political consensus in favour of shale development was always somewhat shallow and fragile. The lower carbon fuel frame in particular largely failed to entice environmentalists to back shale development.

Whilst falling well short of the community ownership model favoured by the energy democracy movement, the framing strategy of the anti-shale coalition arguably forced the government and industry to shift their strategy in order to, however unsuccessfully, create the sense that communities had a shared stake and interest in shale development. The small pocket of dissenting Conservatives, most of whom represented constituencies with actual or proposed exploration sites, were crucial in pushing for this shift. Just as our analysis timeline ended, there were signs that the number of Conservatives using the ‘bad gas governance’ and ‘industrialise the countryside’ frames was growing in response to the permitted development and NSIP proposals (Gabbastiss 2018). Subsequently as part of withdrawing their support for the industry, the government dropped these proposals.

One could simply see this subsequent shale policy U-turn as the government keeping their promise – as a part of the manageable risk frame – to only allow safe shale development. However, one could also see it as evidence that the broader anti-shale development coalition – and especially local communities in Conservative constituencies via pressure on their MPs – had increasingly gained the upper-hand in the discursive struggle and influenced the government’s approach.

Conclusion

Our analysis of coalition membership and framing strategies in the Westminster shale gas debate has identified the ways in which energy democracy themes were used in the frames and counter-frames of both coalitions, alongside other frames with even greater resonance. The ‘lower carbon fuel’ frame was an attempt to align shale development with the energy democracy aim of decarbonisation. Its very existence demonstrates the institutionalisation of the decarbonisation agenda in British politics. However, the ‘dirty fossil fuel’ counter-frame demonstrates that this

'bridging fuel' argument had little resonance beyond the Conservative party. As such, the pro-shale discourse coalition had relatively little success in recruiting those with environmentalist concerns and lacked a broad-based membership.

The 'bad gas governance' frame clearly raised energy democracy themes such as local community participation in and control over energy decision-making. Whilst it had some success in shifting the government and industry toward trying to achieve a greater sense that communities had a stake or interest in development, it still fell well short of the community ownership models that the energy democracy movement envisages.

Our analysis of Westminster's shale debate did identify some modest signs of success for the anti-shale development discourse coalition during our time-frame. The aforementioned institutionalisation of the decarbonisation agenda, the shift toward a greater focus on community interests, the concessions over regulation in the Infrastructure Act 2015, and increasing disquiet on the Conservative backbenches regarding proposed planning reforms, all represented modest achievements for the anti-shale development coalition. These examples suggested that, during our timeline, the anti-shale gas discourse coalition did have some success in influencing thinking, shifting focus, and affecting the conditions within which a shale industry would have to emerge. In this modest way, the anti-shale development discourse coalition did have some success in advancing energy democracy ideals through the UK parliament. This foreshadowed a more dramatic victory in the form of the recently announced moratorium.

However, in spite of recent events, this case nonetheless also highlights some difficult implications for the achievement of energy democracy ideals through discursive struggles in a centralized and adversarial political system like the UK's. Most obviously, the pro-shale development coalition and pro-shale frame use were dominant during our timeline, and for seven years government policy continued to back the development of a domestic shale gas industry.

Furthermore, given that shale gas development proceeded over this period in the UK expressly against the interests of some communities, and contrary to some of the ideals of energy democracy, our case demonstrates some of the imperatives likely to override energy democracy frames and the ideals on which they are based. The prominence of the 'wealth and security' frame points to the imperatives of growth and security, however the use of the 'lower carbon fuel' frame also suggests that the imperative of sustainability may be mobilised against greater local control over energy choices.

Thus, in the end, frames and the party politics driving them become not only about some narrow debate within a political system, or a way to aggregate the preferences of constituents. We can also view them as a precursor of future struggles over our low-carbon future, as a way of maintaining political power or performing for a subset of political interests. In particular, the UK experience

with shale gas during our timeframe demonstrates how a multitude of other political issues, including industrial strategy, regulatory governance, and economic development, can trump the importance of energy democracy as a frame.

Note

1. The first government in our time period – Gordon Brown’s Labour government 2007–2010 – had no policy on shale development, which had not yet fully emerged as an issue in the UK.

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